



Who Framed Roger... Casement?

*Resolving decades of confused speculation, this detective history, by a process of research, logical analysis and elimination, leaves no reasonable doubt that **Captain Reginald Hall**, whose distinction and brilliance masked a vindictive streak, fabricated the Black Diaries attributed to Roger Casement, a leading figure of the Easter Rising.*

By Paul R. Hyde

Roger Casement grew up in South Dublin, worked as a British diplomat, pioneered human rights investigations in the Congo and was knighted in 1911 for an investigation into rubber slavery in the Peruvian Amazon. In World War I he made efforts to solicit German military aid for the 1916 Easter Rising but the British intercepted a signal from the Germans and scuppered the importation of the arms.

Casement was convicted of high treason; and hanged. It was falsely imputed that he was the brain

behind the Rising.

Despite pleas from Arthur Conan Doyle, George Bernard Shaw and WB Yeats and many others across the world, clemency appeals failed, largely because Casement had been tainted.

British officials claimed that Casement, whose moral reputation otherwise remains honourable, kept the Black Diaries which portrayed him as a promiscuous homosexual who paid young men for sex. There is, however, abundant evidence to demonstrate that the diaries, now held in the UK national archives, were

forged. In this piece I prove by whom.

Of the many stories in the controversy of the Black Diaries, probably the most significant one remains untold. In brief the story concerns a casual conversation in a weekend home on the Sussex coast in 1965. In that conversation a retired British naval officer stated that he knew the diaries had been fabricated by his ultimate superior.

Captain William, 'Reginald' Hall, one of the founders of the Admiralty codebreaking operations, was in charge of the successful decryption of German signals including the crucial ones sent to Casement used in his prosecution.

The Metropolitan Police claimed that Casement's luggage was delivered to Scotland Yard

it is *unlikely* the police would have waited 15 months before exposing material that would destroy Casement immediately.

Christopher Andrew, author of 'The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5' (2009) asserts: "Casement claimed that during the interrogation at Scotland Yard he asked to be allowed to appeal publicly for the Easter Rising in Ireland to be called off in order to 'stop useless bloodshed'. His interrogators refused, possibly in the hope that the Rising would go ahead and force the government to crush what they saw as a German conspiracy with Irish nationalists". According to Casement, he was told by Hall, "It is better that a canker-sore like this should be cut out". Hall was steely.

Hall was a remarkable man with what would, today, perhaps be described as a facility for 'thinking outside the box'. Charismatic and sociable, he was also an ingenious master of deception, a devout imperialist of 'strong convictions' with a suitably uncomplicated moral mentality.

He was universally known as 'Blinker' Hall because of the intensity of his eye nictitation, which had a semi-hypnotic effect in conversation. He became a Conservative MP in 1919 and was the mastermind behind the 1924 forgery of the so-called Zinoviev letter which purported to call on British Communists to influence the Labour Party to sign a treaty with Russia. With industrial leaders he was a founder of the shadowy National Propaganda which countered suspected communism in British industry.

Professor Eunan O'Hallpin writes: "Doubts about his reputation arise in three respects: his propensity to take unilateral initiatives on foot of diplomatic and political intelligence produced by Room 40; his frequent disinclination to place intelligence in the hands of those departments best placed to judge it; and his involvement while a post-war politician in anti-government intrigues drawing on his old intelligence connections. Like

many able intelligence officers, he sometimes succumbed to the professional temptation of manipulating good intelligence in order to influence the decisions and actions of the government which he served".

Hall was both a maverick and a Machiavelli, utterly fearless and determined in all he un-

dertook. Admiral James, his biographer and former colleague, confirms the extent of Hall's influence; "... a man whose name and fame spread to every seat of government in both hemispheres ... a man to whom Cabinet Ministers turned when in difficulty ... 'capable of exercising a decisive influence on political affairs' including 'affairs that were the sole concern of the Foreign Secretary.'

What Admiral James calls 'his unorthodox methods' and his personal control over information and secrets made many apprehensive of him so that upon his retirement in 1919 'Inside the Admiralty there were many who would not mourn his departure'.

Ruth Skrine, Hall's personal secretary later wrote; "the Machiavelli in him could be cruel, and the 'means' he used often 'justified the end' in many a battle he fought in the murky world of Intelligence".

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Hall had friends in business, politics, in the press and in gentlemen's clubs and he enjoyed access to the highest in political power including the monarch. Often described as a genius, his was a genius with a distinctly sinister cast. US attaché Edward Bell said he was 'a perfectly marvellous person but the coldest-hearted proposition that ever was - he'd eat a man's heart out...'

An anecdote related by Hall himself testifies to his ruthless audacity. Angered by a lenient sentence imposed on a captured German spy, Hall treacherously fed the judge's home address back to German Intelligence alleging it was a military target. The house was bombed soon after but the elderly judge survived and later innocently related his narrow escape at a dinner with Hall present.

Hall was seen to be on the side of the angels but was not himself of their number. His determination to capture and destroy Casement was evident from 1914 onwards and was relentless. That he was deeply involved in the diaries scandal is confirmed by his biographer Admiral James; 'Though at that time there were not more than a dozen men who knew, or guessed, that Hall had circulated the Casement diary, they included men holding prominent positions who had sworn vengeance against him for



Admiral Reginald Hall: maverick and Machiavelli

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on 25 April, 1916 during his last interrogation by CID chief Basil Thomson and Captain Hall. It is alleged the Black Diaries were found in his luggage. However, many scholars are now convinced that the police seized his luggage early in 1915 casting doubt on the police's story and making it more likely they were forged since



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making the disclosure.' Admiral James did not know that what was in fact shown (not circulated) were police typescripts allegedly copies of unseen diaries.

I here reveal that it is Hall who was the ultimate superior whom the officer named as the fabricator of the diaries encountered, in Sussex in 1965. The officer was Commander Sydney Clipperton and he was talking to Kevin MacDonnell, a London-based press photographer.

This author has spent five months 'stress-testing' MacDonnell's report of what was said, for veracity. This article is as much about the methodology of this analysis as it is about the conclusion. The author presents this analysis as comprehending historical inference to the requisite standard which is that it leaves no reasonable doubt of its truth. This is a different standard from that of proof beyond all reasonable doubt, or proof on the balance of probabilities – favoured by lawyers; or proof by deduction and induction favoured by philosophers, scientists and mathematicians.

On 7 January 1966 MacDonnell wrote to De Valera: "I was informed by an ex- British Naval Intelligence source...that the Casement Diaries were fabricated by his chief, Admiral Hall. He has had the matter on his conscience ever since and though he has great respect for Hall in all other ways he feels this was an evil piece of work...I feel you should be the first person to be given this information. I will never forget your kindness and hospitality when I came across last year with Mr Angeloglou, the Picture Editor of *The Sunday Times*, to photograph you".

De Valera responded on 18 January: "With regard to the other matter, the important thing is to get some positive proof. Nothing else will suffice. I understand you intend visiting Dublin again soon. I would like to see you".

MacDonnell responded on 22 January: "Regarding the Diaries, I am trying hard to obtain names, dates, in short, proof, but my source of information fears he has told me too much already. However, he may put me in touch with other people who worked with Hall and they may be willing to talk".

This article, too, is an attempt to obtain, in short, proof about fabrication of the Diaries.

On 17 January 1966, MacDonnell wrote to a

trusted friend in Dublin. He explained how on a visit to a friend's weekend home on the Sussex coast he had met an elderly neighbour there, Commander Clipperton.

"Obviously a bit lonely, he drops in now and then, usually without phoning first, to have a beer and talk endlessly about his days in the Navy. Most people look on him as a deadly bore, but I am fascinated by the animal brutality of life in the Navy even as late as the twenties and thirties as revealed by him. He really has been all over the place and knows a hell of a lot.

In the course of conversation with Sheila and I the subject of Ireland cropped up. 'I worked at one time with Admiral Hall' he said. 'He was a very clever man indeed. Brilliant. But he was unscrupulous. Though in many ways I admired him, he shouldn't have fixed Casement in the way he did. He fabricated the Diaries, you know, and that was an evil thing to do'. I expressed mild surprise and he said 'Yes, he did it. Just a few of us knew about it. But do you know, it was a very funny thing, much later on in the last war Intelligence put me on the job of bringing a charge against Hall's son who was mixed up with a group of other young officers'. He went

on to tell us how he tapped the phones, etc, and how Hall's son was killed in a raid just before charges could be brought".

Kevin MacDonnell was born in Mayo in 1919 but his family transferred to London in 1922. Educated in England, he became a well-known freelance press photographer. He also wrote for many years regular articles on photography for the popular *Photography* magazine. He worked in theatre photography and advertising and published a number of photography books and manuals. He was known to be affable and was well liked. Further information on his personality and career can be found at onlinedarkroom.blogspot.com/p/kevin-macdonnell.

There is strong evidence to show that in 1965 MacDonnell was not especially interested in



Kevin MacDonnell



Admiralty Old Building, Whitehall

the Casement controversy and was poorly informed. His letter of 17 January indicates a superficial familiarity gained from René MacColl's unsympathetic biography which was reissued in 1965. Moreover, MacDonnell was not an admirer of Casement, writing of him: "He is not my favourite character and must have been a hell of a handicap to the revolution, poor devil". Although the diaries had been available for inspection since 1959, it is clear that after six years MacDonnell had not seen them or even requested to see them. He also seems unaware of Alfred Noyes' 1957 study *The Accusing Ghost*. His antipathy towards Casement was inevitably coloured by his reading of MacColl's book and by the disturbing shadow of the diaries scandal upon a traditional practising Catholic. This evidence indicates that when he reported Clipperton's remarks about Hall and the diaries, MacDonnell had minimal interest in Casement and felt uncertain and uneasy about him.

This writer has identified Commander Clipperton. Sydney Robert Clipperton was born on 28 December, 1898 in Stalham, Norfolk, the youngest son of Robert John Clipperton, a police inspector. At age 16 he joined the Royal Navy in May 1914 and served twenty-four years until his retirement in 1938. On the outbreak of WWII, he joined the Home Guard with the rank of major. By 1958 Clipperton had fully retired and taken up residence in Fairlight, near Hastings. Photographs show a substantial detached house built in the 1920s in its own grounds; the address is The Thatch, Cliff End, Pett Level Road, Fairlight. It was a residential area close to the coast favoured by retired business people, ex-service personnel, returned expats. Clipperton died in Hastings in October 1969 aged 71.

Clipperton's service number was J.31169. Unfortunately his official record seems incomplete and is difficult to decipher and interpret. However, it is clear that he was a telegraphist and that he was awarded two medals: the S. G. C. (?) and gratuity in 1932, and the Royal Victoria Medal (silver) in 1934. Among the ships he served on in the 1930s were HMS Canterbury, Frobisher and Sussex. Evidence from two distinct sources confirms that he became a commander later in his career.

Three caveats are appropriate. Kevin MacDonnell was a freelance photographer working for the press, not a journalist. Secondly, his description of Clipperton as a Naval Intelligence source is misleading. Clipperton was a naval telegraphist, not an intelligence officer. Thirdly, the expression reported by MacDonnell that Clipperton "worked with Hall at one time" is misleading because it suggests a close, regular working relationship. There is no independent evidence for such a relationship. It is probable that in claiming this, Clipperton was enjoying some reflected glory in his retirement years. In the year of the diaries scandal, 1916, he was an eighteen-year-old radio telegraphist.



De Valera at Casement's funeral



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This author has examined the possibility that MacDonnell invented his report of the conversation with Clipperton. While it cannot reasonably be doubted that MacDonnell did meet Clipperton on various occasions, if the content of the conversation were invented, this invention would have a motive which ought to become evident from MacDonnell's subsequent behaviour, from how he exploited the story.

However, it is difficult to determine a plausible motive, if only because MacDonnell's correspondence reveals both a lack of prior interest in and sympathy for Casement. As explained above, he was at this time poorly informed about the controversy which fact *indicates an absence of prior motivation*. Furthermore, his behaviour indicates that he did not know how to verify the story and he certainly failed to do so. Without a credible motive there are sound reasons for excluding the hypothesis

that MacDonnell invented the Clipperton story partly or wholly.

- 1 He related the encounter and revelation in a letter to a close friend in Dublin asking for advice. It is improbable that he would seek to deceive a trusted friend.
- 2 He related the revelation in a letter to and at a meeting with President De Valera. It is improbable that he would seek to deceive a head of state whom he obviously respected.
- 3 He attempted to corroborate Clipperton's revelation. It is not credible that he tried to externally verify a story which he himself had invented.
- 4 Decades later at the age of 78 MacDonnell travelled across London in 1998 to inform Angus Mitchell of the Clipperton conversation. It is not credible that after three decades he would persist with a story he knew to be invented.
- 5 His antipathy towards Casement is incompatible with the invention of a story favourable to Casement's reputation.

The invention of the Clipperton story would require experience of unscrupulous and *professional* deviousness of the sort which intelligence services excel at. MacDonnell had neither a motive nor such a capability. The above grounds and his reactions recorded in his correspondence support the definitive conclusion that MacDonnell is not a weak link in this history.

The conversation reported in MacDonnell's letter of 17 January has two aspects: the reference to Hall and the diaries followed by the reference to the sudden death of Hall's unnamed son during WWII. Verification of either aspect would demonstrate that a conversation with Clipperton about Hall took place. Since



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the purported death ought to be independently verifiable, this aspect can be examined first.

Incontrovertible evidence for the sudden death in WWII of Hall's son, Jack, comes from Admiral Hall himself. Hall had two sons, both navy officers. In 1974 Richard, the younger, deposited family papers in The Churchill Archives at Cambridge University. Among those papers there is an undated letter from Admiral Hall: "Dick just rung me up to tell me that Jack has been killed at Aberdeen; apparently in an air raid he went in to try and rescue some one and was killed by falling masonry; Dick is now getting full details and I have to tell him that our Jack has no wife, I should like him buried up there; as you know I don't like funeral bake meats; legally speaking I suppose I am his nearest relative as Mary has control of Pt. I like to think the lad may now be with Essie again". There follows a letter from Admiral Robert Raikes expressing sympathy. Dick is Richard, Mary is unidentified and Essie might be a pet-name for Hall's wife Ethel who died in 1932.

While this is sufficient independent verification of the death, it does not demonstrate that Clipperton was MacDonnell's source for this fact. However, the death of his older son is not mentioned in Hall's 1955 biography by his former colleague Admiral James. Therefore this book, available to MacDonnell, was not his source. Likewise, the family papers were not the source since these were private until 1974. Two 1942 Aberdeen newspaper reports of the death cannot have been his source either since discovery of these required prior knowledge of the death of Hall's son in WWII. All possible sources being eliminated, it follows, beyond any reasonable measure of doubt, that MacDonnell learned about the death in conversation with Clipperton.

However – crucially - this does not demonstrate the truth of what was purportedly said before about the diaries. At best it contributes to the *probability* that the diaries remarks are also true. Verification of the first aspect about the diaries emerges from scrutiny of eight words cited by MacDonnell: "Just a few of us knew about it". This indicates that the knowledge – "it" - was at that time shared between a small group of persons and was not exclusive to the speaker. The "us" referred to indicates a shared identity and can only refer to a category of Clipperton's *colleagues* rather than an

indiscriminate group of persons. The category is therefore fellow telegraphists. At the time of the conversation, MacDonnell certainly did not know this. Indeed, there is no evidence in his correspondence that he ever knew Clipperton had been a telegraphist.

It is the steps MacDonnell took after the conversation which externally verify Clipperton's statement about the diaries. There is secure evidence that MacDonnell contacted Hall's biographer, Admiral James, asking about Clipperton's colleagues. He received a list of 18 names with identifying details; Clipperton was not on the list. But it is precisely this attempt to *externally verify* the identities of his colleagues which demonstrates that MacDonnell was indeed told by Clipperton that "Just a few of us knew about it" where "it" refers to Hall and the diaries. If MacDonnell had not been told that "Just a few of us knew" that Hall had "fabricated the Diaries", he had nothing to research and no questions to ask Admiral James. It is unthinkable that MacDonnell invented "the few of us" *ex nihilo* and then, knowing this was false, hoped that Admiral James would verify his invention. Thus the first aspect of MacDonnell's report of the conversation too is logically

and definitively demonstrated as true – he was told by Clipperton that Hall had "fabricated the Diaries".

This fact does not confirm the truth of *what he was told*; Clipperton might have been lying. Against this, however, there is Clipperton's stated admiration of Hall which would conflict with the malignance of such a lie. Independent corroboration from his colleagues – the "few of us" – would suffice to prove he was not lying but they remain unidentified. However, there is more: MacDonnell reports that after revealing the fabrication "He [Clipperton]... became very agitated indeed. He said he had told me much more than he should have done ... I quietened him down and I haven't seen him since...". Therefore, if Clipperton was lying, his agitation would be feigned. It is not plausible that he would choose to feign agitation rather than simply deny or even revise his statement and describe it as mere opinion or hearsay. His agitation tends to confirm that he was telling the truth. Moreover, if feigned, his theatrical agitation was a futile and counter-productive *charade* which served only to *demonstrate most convincingly* to MacDonnell that his statement was true. Further confirmation that his agitation was genuine and spontaneous comes from the fact that MacDonnell never saw him again. Therefore no grounds can be found to support the hypothesis that Clipperton was lying. This meets any reasonable standard of historical research and inference.

The following aspects have now been verified: 1 – Clipperton was a telegraphist and later a naval commander; 2 – he spoke about Hall with MacDonnell; 3 – he told MacDonnell about the death of Hall's son; 4 – he told MacDonnell that others knew of Hall's fabrication; 5 – MacDonnell later received a list of Hall's close colleagues from Admiral James.

It therefore follows beyond any reasonable standard of doubt that Clipperton told MacDonnell the truth. This truth is wholly corroborated by the fact first published as *Discovering Casement* in *Village*, October 2016, where it was demonstrated *beyond reasonable doubt* that there is no evidence for the material existence of the bound diaries in 1916 since only police typescripts were shown.

These two demonstrations taken together leave no reasonable doubt that the Black Diaries were fabricated and that Hall was the mastermind behind the plot. In plain words, MacDonnell, a man with no interest in and little time for Casement, found himself by chance listening to *insider knowledge* spontaneously related to him by someone who otherwise admired and esteemed Hall but who decades later still felt that "this was an evil piece of work".

QED. ■

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Casement recognised in Ballyheigue, County Kerry (1994)